United Nations A/70/888/Rev.1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
5 August 2016

Original: English

**Seventieth session**
Agenda items 28 (b) and 124

**Social development: social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family**

**Interaction between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

## Note verbale dated 20 April 2016 from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General and, on behalf of Bangladesh in its capacity as Chair of the Governing Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, has the honour to transmit herewith the text of the outcome document of the general debate on rejuvenating democracy, giving voice to youth, adopted by consensus on 23 March 2016 by the 134th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, held in Lusaka (see annex).

The Permanent Mission requests that the present note verbale and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 28 (b) and 124.

16-13622 (E) 170816

Please recycle

## Annex to the note verbale dated 20 April 2016 from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English and French]

## Outcome document of the general debate on rejuvenating democracy, giving voice to youth

**Adopted by consensus on 23 March 2016 by the 134th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, held in Lusaka**

As an international organization, as national parliaments and as individual representatives of the people, we are driven by our belief in democracy.

We understand democracy as both a set of values and as a system of institutions that puts those values into practice. At the most fundamental level, we believe that everyone has the right to be heard, and that all voices carry equal weight. Our primary responsibility as parliamentarians is to serve the people and deliver policies and legislation that address their needs and interests.

We understand that there is no single model of democracy. A country's institutions evolve from its particular history, culture and traditions. Equally, we unequivocally reaffirm that the principles of democracy are universal. We reaffirm the core values of democratic parliaments. Those values are about:

- Seeking to be representative of the country's social and political diversity;
- Being open to our citizens and transparent in the conduct of parliamentary business;
- Ensuring accessibility and accountability to our citizens; and
- Performing our work effectively.

We underline that the practices of democracy must constantly change with the times, so that they reflect the societies that nourish them.

Today, our democracies face key challenges. We are challenged to restore and strengthen public confidence in the institutions of democracy. The perception of disconnect, corruption and inauthenticity undermines our institutions and the image of politics and politicians. Voter turnout in elections has tended to decrease over time, especially among young people. Barriers to democracy, and the tendency for any part of the population to turn their backs on our institutions, are a concern to us all. Statistically, young people are least likely to vote and are increasingly disengaged from formal political processes.

This lack of engagement cannot be attributed to apathy. Young people use many different platforms to engage in democracy, such as social media, youth organizations and in some cases, protests and unrest. Rather political institutions have too often failed to open up to young people. Our institutions have not kept up with the fast-changing and increasingly interconnected world into which young people have been born.

More than half of the world today is under 30 years of age. As today's young people become tomorrow's adult population, we run the risk of failing to address

their growing disengagement. Over time, that failure threatens to undermine the very legitimacy of our governments and parliaments. We must act now.

We note with satisfaction that in the 2030 Agenda, governments recognize that peace, justice and strong institutions are essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. We have long held that belief. We can and must do more to ensure that parliaments live up to the core values that we have defined for ourselves. We believe that the 2030 Agenda cannot be achieved without inclusively harnessing the power of all parts of our societies. Harnessing the dynamism of young people is a top priority as they will be the prime beneficiaries of the Agenda's results. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development now provides an opportunity to renew momentum for strengthening the institutions of democracy.

Our response to rising extremism must be based on more democracy, not less. Radicalism can only be defeated if we give young people the opportunities they deserve. We must stand firm in our beliefs and not be tempted into undemocratic responses to the challenges facing us.

It is time to take action for a democratic renaissance. And we can start rejuvenating democracy today by giving voice to youth. Citizens of all ages have a role to play in rejuvenating democracy. However, young people are now the majority of the world population. They are critical thinkers, change makers and bearers of fresh ideas. That is why we are convinced that young people are ideally placed to be the key agents of a democratic renaissance. We therefore need to make sure that we give voice to youth and that we are ready and able to hear that voice.

Increasing youth participation is a key element of giving voice to youth which will rejuvenate democracy. We are concerned that only 1.9 per cent of the world's parliamentarians are aged under 30. We recognize that we have a duty to create an enabling environment that guarantees young people's participation and galvanizes their leadership. We acknowledge that no decision about youth should be taken without youth. That is why we pledge to increase youth representation in parliament. And that is why we need to link up with youth, both formally and informally. We must reach out to them where they are — on social media platforms, in schools, universities and public spaces. We reaffirm with renewed vigour our commitment to implement the 2010 IPU resolution Youth participation in the democratic process by enhancing young people's connection to the world of politics and facilitating their political representation.

Rejuvenating democracy is about ensuring that everyone is included. Our governments must be based on the will of the people and be accountable to the people for their actions. Healthy institutions of democracy must ensure that power is not concentrated in the hands of the few. Inclusion is necessary not only to ensure that the rights of people are continuously respected and fulfilled, but also to bring all people closer to political institutions and ensure that we make better policy.

Through inclusive parliaments, citizens can shape their democracies according to their own circumstances and better contribute to the make-up of the societies of today and tomorrow.

Rejuvenating democracy is also about adapting our parliaments to our time. It is about rethinking their processes, so as to respond to evolving social and individual needs. By being gender-sensitive in their composition, structures and work, our parliaments can adapt better to the growing evolution of men and

women's roles in society and in the family. Gender-sensitive parliaments have great benefits, in particular to young women and men parliamentarians, as no one should sacrifice their personal life to engage in politics today.

Rejuvenating democracy is about modernizing the functioning of our institutions. Opening up to new technologies makes it possible to usher in a new era of democracy 2.0. The exponential increase in the use of modern technologies and social media, and in access to information has changed the ways that citizens participate. Our parliaments must open up to the online world in their structures and mechanisms, so as to adapt to the expanded space and time of modern communication, interaction and participation.

Rejuvenating democracy is about changing the way politics is done. Citizens rightly expect the highest levels of integrity from us and our institutions. Change will be driven by clean politics, transparent procedures, and anti-corruption policies and laws. They should be implemented by all of us. By honestly fulfilling our mandate as representatives of the people, we will contribute to rebuilding the weakened trust in us and our institutions. We will make our democracies better and stronger if we keep our electoral promises, remain accessible to our citizens, act responsibly, transparently and accountably, and inspire young people through our words and actions.

Rejuvenating democracy is also about delivering for a better future. The voices of future generations need to be included in our political debates and processes. We need to ensure that our posterity has a better quality of life than we do, and can live a healthy life on a healthy planet. We therefore need to make sure that our deliberations and decisions embody the needs of tomorrow's generations.

At this 134th Assembly, many innovative proposals for strengthening democracy and engaging young people have been put forward. We encourage governments and parliaments to experiment with new ideas that could make the institutions of democracy more responsive to the people.

We pledge to rejuvenate democracy including by taking action to:

- Renew and refresh the profile of people who hold political office, so that parliaments and other decision-making bodies are more inclusive of society's social and political diversity;
- Enhance youth representation in our parliaments, including by considering the adoption of quotas, revisiting age restrictions to run for political office, building party political support, entrusting young MPs with leadership positions, and promoting young MPs as role models for other young people; particular attention should be given to the specific situation and needs of young women;
- Reform our parliamentary processes and internal policies to make them more sensitive to the needs of younger women and men, including by considering the adoption of anti-harassment policies, reforming parental leave, and implementing proxy voting;
- Promote the use of modern technologies to enhance transparency and accountability; use innovations such as online petitions, virtual hearings and submissions, and online interactions and voting to bring citizens, and young people in particular, into the parliamentary process;

- Establish specialized parliamentary committees on youth and networks of young parliamentarians to consolidate youth perspectives into parliamentary work; open up parliamentary deliberations to young people, including through regular parliamentary hearings and consultations, as well as through linking up with youth parliaments and councils, student associations and youth NGOs;
- Ensure that political empowerment is promoted in school curricula through civic education and practical initiatives, such as mock parliaments, mock voting and political debating; invest in youth parliaments and councils for young people below the voting age and enhance youth participation in politics by lowering the voting age;
- Include young representatives in international fora and deliberations, in particular at the IPU, by systematically including at least one young man or young woman member in delegations;
- Use the International Day of Democracy (15 September) to celebrate the successes of democracy and face up to its challenges.

It is our duty to rejuvenate democracy to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations. In doing so, we must harness the creativity, energy and enthusiasm of our citizens, particularly of young men and women. We cannot wait for another generation to act. The time to act is now.